

# MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



## *Office of Public Information*

contact: Marcia McBrien | (517) 373-0129

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **ADOPTION WORK BY COUNTIES TO BE RECOGNIZED WITH OCT. 30 AWARDS** **Awards honor memory of late Judge Robert E. Weiss of Flint; WJRT-TV team also to be honored for series on “Baby Court” family reunification project that Weiss helped pioneer**

LANSING, MI, October 13, 2009 – The late Judge Robert E. Weiss of Flint, a long-time family court judge, was known for his work on behalf of children, including Flint’s “baby court,” an early intervention project for troubled families with very young children. Now his legacy will be remembered through awards recognizing success in family reunification, adoption, and other permanent placements for children in abuse and neglect cases.

The first annual Hon. Robert E. Weiss Awards will go to county teams that participated in “Adoption Forum I,” a project of the [Michigan Supreme Court](#), the [Child Welfare Services Division](#) of the [State Court Administrative Office](#), and [Michigan Department of Human Services](#).

Recipients of the Weiss Awards include:

- **Berrien County, Excellence in Working as a Team.** For teamwork in reducing the length of time children waited for a permanent home.
- **Genesee County, Excellence in Creative Solutions.** For creative responses to adoption barriers.
- **Oakland County, Excellence in Court Improvement.** For implementing innovative solutions to reduce delays in court process and procedure.
- **Saginaw County, Excellence in Judicial Leadership.** For overcoming court-related barriers to adoption through judicial leadership.

Other award recipients are news anchor Angie Hendershot, news director Jim Bleicher, and photojournalist Christopher Carr of WJRT-TV (ABC 12), who are being honored for their “Baby Court” series, which documented Weiss’ program over several months.

The awards ceremony will take place at noon on October 30 at East Lansing’s Kellogg Conference Center. [Chief Justice Marilyn Kelly](#) of the Michigan Supreme Court will present the awards.

The event is part of an “adoption and permanency forum” which will also focus on guardianships and reunifications of biological families, according to Child Welfare Services Director Daniel J. Wright.

“With the first adoption forum, which was launched in March 2008, we demonstrated that we could have more timely adoptions for children who had that goal,” Wright said. “Now our focus is on all forms of permanency, including adoptions, guardianships, and family reunifications, so that we can give more children the safety and stability that they deserve.”

The first adoption forum included 13 Michigan counties – Berrien, Calhoun, Genesee, Ingham, Jackson, Kalamazoo, Kent, Macomb, Monroe, Muskegon, Oakland, Saginaw, and Wayne – which participated in the forum at the request of Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura D. Corrigan and DHS Director Ismael Ahmed. Those counties, which have the state’s largest adoption dockets, assembled teams to facilitate adoptions for children who had that goal and had adoptive parents identified, yet had been in foster care for over a year. As a result of a concerted effort by judges, social workers, staff of the Michigan Department of Human Services, attorneys, and others, the counties saw a 14 percent increase in adoptions from March 2008 to March 2009, according to a Child Welfare Services report released in May.

A second adoption forum, convened in March 2009, targeted 10 additional counties with the next-largest adoption dockets: Bay, Clinton, Ionia, Lenawee, Midland, Ottawa, St. Clair, St. Joseph, Van Buren, and Washtenaw. All 23 county teams were to concentrate on removing barriers to, and expediting the process for, all forms of permanency.

The October 30 forum will feature reports by county teams. The keynote speaker, Judge Nancy Salyers of Illinois, will address reunification of children with their biological families in abuse and neglect cases. She will also speak on concurrent planning – having more than one permanency option for a child in the event that reunification is not possible.

To view the Child Welfare Services report from the first adoption forum, go to <http://www.courts.michigan.gov/scao/resources/publications/reports/AdoptionForumI-FinalReport2009.pdf>.

-- MSC --